

Message Text

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PAGE 01 SAO PA 01479 191723Z

ACTION ARA-14

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FM AMCONSUL SAO PAULO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8521

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AMCONSUL RIO DE JANEIRO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAO PAULO 1479

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, BR

SUBJ: VIEWS OF FORMER SAO PAULO GOVERNOR ABREU SODRE ON
NATIONAL POLITICAL SITUATION

REF: A) SAO PAULO 1278 B) SAO PAULO 1480

1. SUMMARY: FORMER GOVERNOR ABREU SODRE STATED THAT THE WEAKNESS OF GENERAL JOAO BAPTISTA FIGUEIREDO AS THE POSSIBLE NEXT PRESIDENT IS THE ROOT CAUSE OF CURRENT POLITICAL UNREST. HIS JUDGMENT IS THAT "THE POLITICAL SITUATION IS ACCELERATING". HE DOES NOT BELIEVE THAT THE FIGUEIREDO CANDIDACY WILL LAST. SODRE STATED THAT SECOND ARMY COMMANDER GENERAL DILERMANDO GOMES MONTEIRO TOLD HIM THAT HE DOES NOT SUPPORT FIGUEIREDO, BUT HE DOES SUPPORT GEISEL AND WOULD CONTINUE TO DO SO AS LONG AS GEISEL REMAINED WITHIN THE LAW AND AS LONG AS HE, DILERMANDO, JUDGED THAT IT WAS IN THE NATIONAL INTEREST TO DO SO. SODRE STATED THAT HE BELIEVES THAT THE POSSIBLE CANDIDACY OF GENERAL EULER BENTES DE MONTEIRO AS THE MDB CANDIDATE HAD ALREADY PEAKED. HE THOUGHT EULER WAS WEAK IN THE MILITARY AND THAT A THIRD CANDIDATE MIGHT EMERGE TO PROMOTE NATIONAL UNITY. SODRE LINKED THIS IDEA WITH THE POSSIBILITY OF A RAPID, PEACEFUL DEMOCRATIC OPENING, LED BY PRESIDENT GEISEL. HE STATED THAT HE DID NOT HAVE SPECIFIC

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 SAO PA 01479 191723Z

INFORMATION IN THIS REGARD, BUT THE "INDICATORS WERE POINTING IN THIS DIRECTION". SODRE'S COMMENTS ON SAO PAULO SITUATION CONTAINED REFTEL B. END SUMMARY.

2. FORMER SAO PAULO GOVERNOR ABREU SODRE TOLD CONGENOFF MAY 18 THAT HE THOUGHT THAT THE ROOT CAUSE OF THE UNREST IN THE COUNTRY WAS THE POLITICAL WEAKNESS OF GENERAL FIGUEIREDO. SODRE RECALLED

THAT THE FIGUEIREDO CANDIDACY HAD HAD PROBLEMS FROM THE BEGINNING. LAST OCTOBER THERE HAD BEEN THE SHOWDOWN WITH THE ARMY MINISTER, GENERAL FROTA. THAT SHOULD HAVE ALERTED PRESIDENT GEISEL TO THE NEED TO CONSULT THE ARMY THOROUGHLY BEFORE NAMING A CANDIDATE. INSTEAD, GEISEL DID THE OPPOSITE. THE SAME EXCLUSIVE SELECTION PATTERN WAS ALSO FOLLOWED FOR THE GOVERNORSHIPS, STATED SODRE, EVEN THOUGH GEISEL'S OWN RESTRICTIVE LEGISLATION OF APRIL 1977 HAD TO BE VIOLATED. SODRE SAID THAT SINCE FIGUEIREDO WAS SELCCTED IN JANUARY, HIS POLITICAL STOCK HAS DECLINED CONTINUOUSLY; FIGUEIREDO HAD SHOWN HIMSELF TO BE INTELLECTUALLY AND EMOTIONALLY UNFIT FOR THE POSITION AND TO HAVE A CREASS PERSONALITY WHICH DOES NOT COMMAND RESPECT. "THE ARMY IS EMBARRASSED TO BE REPRESENTED AT HOME AND ABROAD BY FIGUEIREDO", STATED SODRE. HE CITED FIGUEIREDO'S INTERVIEW TO FOLHA DE SAO PAULO (SAO PAULO 1278) AS CONTAINING THE MOST DAMAGING PUBLIC STATEMENTS.

3. SODRE SAID THAT THE GENERALS ARE TURNING AWAY FROM SUPPORT FOR FIGUEIREDO. THAT WAS WHY THE NEWSPAPERS EVERY DAY CARRIED REMARKS BY GENERALS INDICATING THEIR WILLINGNESS TO CONSIDER AS NORMAL THE CANDIDACY OF GENERAL EULER BENTES DE MONTEIRO. SODRE SPECULATED THAT GEISEL AND GOLBERY MIGHT BE SABOTAGING FIGUEIREDO'S CANDIDACY, NOW THAT THEY SAW THE OVERWHELMING NEGATIVE REACTION TO IT. SODRE RELATED THAT SECOND ARMY COMMANDER DILERMANDO GOMES MONTEIRO "HAPPENED TO DROP IN LAST NIGHT AT MY HOUSE. HE HAS NEVER DONE IT BEFORE. HE STAYED FOUR HOURS TALKING POLITICS." SODRE STATED THAT DILERMANDO SAID THAT HE DID CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 SAO PA 01479 191723Z

NOT SUPPORT FIGUEIREDO, BUT HE DOES SUPPORT GEISEL AND WOULD CONTINUE TO DO SO AS LONG AS GEISEL REMAINED WITHIN THE LAW AND AS LONG AS HE, DILERMANDO, JUDGED THAT IT WAS IN THE NATIONAL INTEREST TO DO SO. SODRE SAID THAT DILERMANDO'S PREOCCUPATION WITH THE NATIONAL SITUATION WAS EVIDENT.

4. REGARDING THE POSSIBLE NOMINATION BY THE MDB OF GENERAL EULER BENTES DE MONTEIRO AS A CANDIDATE FOR THE PRESIDENCY SODRE SAID THAT HE THOUGHT THAT EULER HAD ALREADY PEAKED. IN SODRE'S VIEW, EULER HAD SHOWN HIS WEAK POSITION IN THE MILITARY BY SEEKING THE MDB NOMINATION AGGRESSIVELY, WHEN HE SHOULD HAVE WAITED FOR THE PARTY TO COME TO HIM. HOWEVER, EULER'S AVAILABILITY, AND THE AVAILABILITY OF A NUMBER OF OTHER GENERALS, WAS A REFLECTION OF ANTI-FIGUEIREDO SENTIMENT IN THE MILITARY.

5. SODRE SAID THAT IT IS HIS JUDGMENT THAT "THE NATIONAL POLITICAL SITUATION IS ACCELERATING". HE SAID HE DID NOT BELIEVE THAT THE FIGUEIREDO CANDIDACY WOULD LAST UNTIL OCTOBER 15, WHEN THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE MEETS. SODRE STATED "IT IS MY GUESS THAT THE POLITICAL SITUATION WILL BE RESOLVED IN THE NEXT TWO MONTHS". HE SPECULATED THAT A THIRD PERSON MIGHT EMERGE AS THE FINAL CANDIDATE, BUT BEFORE THAT OCCURRED, SODRE SAID HE

EXPECTED A DRAMATIC, BUT PEACEFUL DEMOCRATIC OPENING LED BY
GEISEL. ASKED WHETHER HE HAD SPECIFIC INFORMATION TO THAT EFFECT,
SODRE REPLIED "NO. BUT THAT IS THE WAY THE INDICATORS POINT."
(COMMENT: SODRE IS OCCASIONALLY GIVEN TO FLIGHTS OF POLITICAL
FANTASY.) SODRE STATED THT IT WOULD BE VERY DIFFICULT TO GOVERN
THE COUNTRY IF ANYONE TRIED TO BECOME MORE AUTHORITARIAN:
"THE ONLY WAY THE GOVERNMENT CAN OBTAIN SUPPORT IS BY OPENING UP."
HE SAID THAT THE HARD-LINE WAS SMALL AND HAD LITTLE SUPPORT OUTSIDE
THE MILITARY.

6. COMMENT: SODRE HAS EXCELLENT CONTACTS IN THE MILITARY AND
WITHIN THE SAO PAULO ELITE. SINCE SODRE BECAME PUBLICLY ACTIVE
SEVERAL WEEKS AGO AGAINST THE OFFICIAL CHOICE OF LAUDO NATEL
FOR GOVERNOR OF SAO PAULO, HE HAS BECOME SOMETHING OF A LIGHTN-
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PAGE 04 SAO PA 01479 191723Z

ING ROD FOR DISSIDENTS OF THE REVOLUTION IN SAO PAULO.
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